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CHRISTIAN SCIENCE AND THE REASON OF ITS STRENGTH.

WE do not hesitate to accept the theory of de Lametrie as summed up in the title of his little book *L'homme une machine*, only we insist on the truism that all living organisms, even plants, are alive and therefore *living* machines, and further that animals are both *living* and *sentient* machines, which implies that, though sentiments and thoughts considered as such are not motions, the physiological process which takes place in nervous substance while man feels and thinks is purely mechanical. We purposely do not say that thought is motion, but that the physiological process of thinking is as mechanical a process as is an electric shock, or a chemical combination, or the movement of a machine. Brain-action is a most complicated process involving chemical changes and electrical tensions, but with all its wonderful and untraceable minuteness of detail in molecular mechanics it is as physical a phenomenon as the fall of a stone or the motion of a lever and the turn of a crank.

Without entering into a discussion of the basic conceptions of psychology, we will only point out some important conclusions establishing what is popularly called "the power of mind over matter," which can be directly derived from the principles of this most radical and, in scientific circles, largely accepted theory. A due appreciation of the oneness of thought and physical brain action will throw

more light even upon those mental phenomena that have often puzzled thoughtful observers, than do mystical and spiritualistic theories.

The character of a man is a very important factor of his life. Indeed we are justified in calling it the most important one. It is even more important than the question whether or not an engine is well oiled. Two machines may be of exactly the same construction, but if one is not properly lubricated, it will refuse to work. In the same way a man who is dejected in spirit, and of a gloomy and pessimistic disposition will naturally prove a failure, while some other day if he be buoyant and in high spirits he will without difficulty be successful in the same kind of enterprise. Just as an engineer must keep his machine well oiled so must we keep our minds well disposed and thus overcome the jarring friction of ill-temper.

It is remarkable to what an extent the disposition of a man enters as a factor in his daily life. It may make or mar his destiny, and if anything lies within our own power to regulate, it is our attitude toward the world.

Kant tells us that he suffered greatly from *angina pectoris*, and we know that patients of this type are subject to nightmares and many psychical depressions which sometimes render them unfit for transacting business and prove a great hindrance to their mental and bodily development. Kant acquired a thorough medical insight into his condition, and, simply by a calm consideration of the physical character of his disorder, mastered it to such an extent as to conquer it almost entirely. He reached an advanced age and suffered very little during attacks because he prepared himself to receive them with a calmness that made them pass by without disturbing his mental equilibrium or doing any other incidental harm.

But the influence of mind over matter goes further still. A belief in ghosts will conjure up ghosts, and these

specters are as real to the visionary as dream apparitions are to the man in ordinary normal sleep. We must only consider how sense-impressions originate, and bear in mind their subjective nature. A hallucination, though purely subjective, is frequently as concrete and definite as the sensation of a real objective thing, and it is true, as Shakespeare says, that we are such stuff as dreams are made on. The unsophisticated man believes that he sees an external object, but the thing that appears to him outside of himself is in fact a sensation on his retina. If memory traces of former sensations registered somewhere in the nervous substance of the brain are stimulated, they are revived and if the process is sufficiently strong they will be almost as vivid as the sensation of the original impression. This should ordinarily happen in dreams only, but it also occurs in the waking state of consciousness, quite frequently among primitive people, while in civilized society it is rare and mostly limited to a few abnormal minds, where it may or may not be a symptom of disease. The poet's imagination is sometimes so vivid as to make him actually see the visions of his mind to which he gives utterance in verse, and the inventor similarly visualizes the combinations of his devices. Men of a critical disposition and trained in the art of self-observation will analyze the form of any apparition that may come to them and the specter will dissolve before their eyes under the wholesome influence of a calm contemplation.

Goethe tells us in his "Erlking" the tragic story of a child who died of fright, and Bürger in his "Leonore" relates the feverish hallucination of a maiden whose lover did not return from the field of battle. In these cases the cerebral agitation of an excited mind affects the whole body and leads to a tragic end. To the same category belongs the story of the death of a court jester who for some bad joke had been condemned to death, but secretly

pardoned. His master, a German duke, had ordered the executioner to use a long sausage instead of a sword, but when the stroke came, the poor fool expecting to die, fell dead.

A striking instance of the power of faith is the story of the holy lance of Antioch which saved the army of the crusaders from perdition, and it is important for our purpose that the details of this most interesting and instructive event are historically well established and even the legendary accretions can be traced to their origin, since many accounts were written down immediately after the marvelous delivery of the Christians.

The crusaders, divided according to nationality (among which the Normans under Boemund and the Provençals under Raimond were the main constituents) laid siege to Antioch in May 1098, but Kerbogha of Mosul approached with a large army which, according to some reports was not less than 300,000, and according to others even more than 600,000. It was a well equipped and formidable army which by numbers alone threatend to crush the bold invaders. Before the Moslem forces reached the field of action Boemund succeeded through the help of a traitor to take possession of Antioch (June 2) but the situation soon became more precarious. Kerbogha cut off the supply of food and water so as to reduce the Christians to a miserable plight, and many of them, even some of the leaders, such as Count Stephen of Blois and for a time even Peter of Amiens, deserted in despair; some surrendered to the Saracens and became Moslems, while others tried to make their escape, most of them perishing in the attempt. The starving crusaders in their dire emergency were compelled to eat the most incredible things if they could but be chewed and swallowed; grass, the bark of trees, shoe leather, and the half-decayed carcasses of dead animals were deemed a luxury. At the same time Kerbogha

harassed the weakened soldiers by constant attacks and tired them out through the necessity of being constantly on the alert to repel the enemy. Rarely has an army seen more distress than did the crusaders in those days. They became lamentably demoralized and their final destruction according to all human calculation seemed to be merely a question of days.

At this point Peter Bartholomew, a man of low birth, came to Count Raimond and announced that St. Andrew had appeared to him in a vision and had shown him the holy lance with which Christ had been pierced at the crucifixion, and informed him that it lay deeply buried in the church of St. Peter at Antioch. If the crusaders would but come into its possession they would soon be delivered from all their trouble. Count Raimond and most of his Provençals gave heed at once to Peter Bartholomew's message, while Boemund and his Normans smiled at their credulity. Twelve men dug in the church for a whole day until night time. They had almost despaired of finding anything when at an advanced hour of the night a lance was actually discovered. And now the joy of the crusaders knew no limit. Many doubters became converted and the hope for a final victory revived at a marvelous rate. Boemund and his more critical friends did not oppose this powerful wave of fanaticism, because it accomplished as if by a miracle what they had long tried in vain to do. The spirit of the whole army was changed, for a bold confidence in their cause had replaced their former pusillanimity.

By general consent Boemund now took command of the whole army. The other princes recognizing his higher ability voluntarily surrendered to him their authority. He restored order among the demoralized troops and with great circumspection prepared an attack on the enemy whose numbers were several times their own. The crusaders had to leave behind almost half of their own army to de-

fend the fortifications of Antioch, while the Saracens could lead their entire forces into battle. In spite of these enormous odds the Christian army was ensouled with a faith in the miraculous power of the holy lance which was carried in front of their army, and this fanaticism which fortunately was combined with the calm judgment of Boemund, inspired the Christians with almost superhuman strength and made their onslaught irresistible. The battle was fought out to a finish and Kerbogha's army was annihilated on June 28th. The Moslem camp with its rich supplies and great treasures was taken and Antioch with the surrounding country became the undisputed possession of the victorious Christians.

Boemund had always doubted the genuineness of the lance, and he finally succeeded in proving his contention. He kept silent so long as he saw that this grand faith cure restored the sinking courage of the Christians, and in this instance the miracle was accomplished although the lance was an imposition and its discovery a farce.

Similar triumphs of preconceived ideas in which the power of thought, whether wrong or right, true or false, plays an important part, happen frequently,—we have only to refer to the case of the Maid of Orleans; but events are rare in which we can trace success so clearly to the enthusiasm of a superstition as in the case of the holy lance of Antioch.

It is remarkable that a similar confidence in success seems to extend also to animals, to machines, and even to the most lifeless objects. They seem to be better fitted for their purpose and we can not doubt that the way they are handled frequently makes them more serviceable in critical moments.

Superstition alone is apt to lead to failure, but when fanaticism is coupled with a levelheaded circumspection it can surmount the greatest difficulties and accomplish,

not exactly the impossible, yet assuredly incredibly great things. The Roundheads were strong through prayer, but Cromwell used to remind them of the necessity of keeping their powder dry.

All instances of faith-cure, the healing by prayer, mesmerism, etc., also the miraculous cures in the cemetery of Père La Chaise at Paris, mentioned by Hume, belong to this class and prove the influence of mind upon the domain of physical nature. If we remember that mind is the subjective aspect of physiological processes, and if we understand the full significance of this close interrelation of matter and mind in all its consequences, we can not only judge how these apparent miracles are possible, but will also know their limitations. To the naive believer the experience of one flagrant success is such an evidence of the unlimited power of faith that he will fondly imagine that there is no end to the possibilities of faith and that failures are always due to unbelief. Says Jesus:*

“Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

We cannot doubt that Christianity in its primitive forms actually cherished the hope of being able to cure by faith, although this feature was not made prominent by St. Paul, nor was it encouraged by the organizers of the Church, but an adherent of this idea inserted into the canon this parting word of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples (Mark xvi. 17, 18): “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

* Matt. xvii. 20.

Here miracles are positively made the signs of discipleship, and we can not doubt that among the early Christians many events happened and many things were believed which aroused in them the confidence that miracles were possible indeed.

The truth is that there is actually a power of mind over body, and this power seems almost incredible in its varied applications and marvelous results. But we would say that from a monistic standpoint they are simply what ought to be expected, and many unusual successes are attainable without a belief in miracles solely by self-control and self-discipline. People of a deficient education and without strength of will are frequently helped by fanaticism and superstition; they can be so electrified by a thrilling error as to accomplish things greater than they know or comprehend. They become, as it were, the instrument of a mystic idea which seizes them and carries them away they know not whither; and so they are naturally bewildered by the spiritual storm that with a happy blast carries their soul into a haven of safety.

It is apparent that many phenomena of faith-cure, Christian Science, mental healing and their ilk are as well established as they are old and well known to historians. The Christian Science movement is the revival of a belief based upon certain experiences and to some extent justified by remarkable events that have happened again and again under all zones and in all ages. Such beliefs crop out spontaneously whenever they are needed and will disappear again when they have done their work. Sane men will naturally employ the good that is in Christian Science and faith-cure. In fact they have done so long ago and all the time. To them the gospel of Christian Science is nothing new. But to those who lack the self-discipline which ought to be a part of an all-around education, it will come as a remarkable help in many difficult situations and will,

if it but be kept within fair limits, contribute to their spiritual as well as bodily welfare.

It stands to reason that the errors of the movement will soon be remedied by experience, though in some cases it may have to be bought dearly. In the meantime, however, it will make its devotees cheerful when others would fain break down in the tribulations of life and will give them strength sometimes under extraordinary difficulties.

The significance of self-discipline and the power of mind has been unduly neglected by educators, physicians and other guides and advisers of mankind. To be sure Christian Science has its very weak points, but it would not exist had it not a mission to fulfil.

EDITOR.